

CHAPTER 19

Updating the Gendered Empire

Where Are the Women in Occupied Afghanistan and Iraq?

Empire. Until not long ago the study of empires was the purview of academic historians. Some historians, though, especially male historians, recently managed to draw considerable attention from thoughtful magazines and television's serious talk shows for their hefty new or reissued books on empire.¹ Sales figures began to rise and media invitations rolled in. Readers and viewers were beginning to look for parallels to contemporary international affairs. We often try to sort out puzzles by thinking through analogies. Analogies are powerful. If we get our analogies wrong, our explanations are likely to be askew. In the wake of the U.S. military invasions of Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003, those experts invited to speak in the public arena began to summon British and even Roman history in order to ask: Are we today seeing the emergence of a new empire?

As the U.S.-led wars in Afghanistan and Iraq dragged on,

there were good reasons not only for media commentators and political decision-makers, but also for ordinary citizens to become curious about past experiences of empire. History teachers began to feel vindicated. Victorian wasn't just stuffy furniture. Caesar wasn't just a salad dressing.

Does the global reach of the present United States military, political, cultural, and economic influence have the cohesiveness, the expansiveness, and the sustainability to amount to an "empire"? Or, to put it more concretely: If we compare the U.S. role in the world today — its invasions and political occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq; its diplomatic roles in the former Yugoslavia and Liberia; its global network of military bases stretching from North Carolina and San Diego to Guam, South Korea, Okinawa, Uzbekistan, Kuwait, Iraq, Turkey, Bosnia, Germany, and Britain; its refusal to ratify a host of new international treaties; its manufacturing, trading, and banking practices from Poland to Indonesia — with those military, cultural, economic, and diplomatic practices of earlier Roman, Persian, Hapsburg, Ottoman, British, Belgian, Russian, Chinese, Japanese, U.S., French, Spanish, and Dutch empires, do we risk comparing an orange with apples? Or are we perhaps on firmer ground, comparing a new apple with a host of earlier apples?

Despite their remarkable absence from interview shows and op-ed pages, scores of feminist historians have given us fresh, detailed accounts of how both women and notions of femininity were pressed into service by earlier empire-builders.

Where were the women? Thanks to three decades of sleuthing by feminist historians, we now know where to point our analytical binoculars. We know not to look just at the gilded diplomatic halls, the bloody battlefields, and the floors of stock

exchanges. We have been taught by these pioneering feminist historians to point our glasses farther afield. If groundbreaking feminist historians — Philippa Levine, Piya Chatterjee, Kumari Jayawardena, and others — were invited to submit feature articles and to give mainstream media interviews, they would urge us instead to look inside brothels, to peer into respectable parlors, to press our noses against the sooty windows of factories, to keep an eye on sexual relations on tea plantations.² All of these sites, it turns out, though far from the official centers of imperial power, have been sites of empire-making. That is, empires are built in parlors. Empires are built in brothels. Empires are built in allegedly “private” places. Given that, we need to examine the current possibility of a U.S. imperial enterprise from the vantage points of parlors and brothels. To make sense of putative American empire-building, we have to become much more curious — curious about the marriage aspirations of factory women, about the gender dynamics inside soldiers’ families, about sexual policies of the U.S. military forces in Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, Iraq, and Kuwait. And that is just the beginning. Reports now labeled “human interest stories” have to be considered as serious commentaries on foreign policy.

These thoughtful, worldly feminist investigators also have shown us how diverse and complex women’s actions and feelings have been within empires. Women as tea pickers, women as nannies, women as teachers, women as wives, women as explorers, women as missionaries, women as activist reformers, women as mothers, women as educators, women as mistresses, women as prostitutes, women as textile factory workers, women as writers, women as overseas settlers, women as anticolonial nationalists —

each in their own way played crucial, yet overlooked, roles in greasing (or clogging) the wheels of an imperial enterprise. The roles each group played were “crucial” because so many empire-builders designed international power-extension strategies that relied on particular ideas about where different sorts of women “naturally” were meant to be. The imperial strategists may have been men, but they were men who thought (and worried) a lot about women. The imperial strategists — and their male opponents too — may constantly have weighed varieties of masculinity, but they could do so only by trying to rank and manipulate the varieties of femininity.³ By not asking about women in this current, possibly imperial enterprise — except, that is, for the Western media’s seeming addiction to the visual image of the veiled Muslim woman — the commentators now capturing the public limelight are making both themselves as men inside empires and other men and masculinities in empires virtually invisible. Feminists all over the world have learned how risky *those* sins of omission can be.

WILL THE WOMEN STAND UP?

In the 1980s, at a meeting in Happy Valley, Labrador, a group of Native Canadian women of the Innu community brought together several dozen women, mostly from other parts of Canada, to discuss the effects that a NATO air force base was having on their lives. The term “empire” was not used. Yet fueling this collective conversation was a shared feminist curiosity about how unequal international power relations between allied masculinized governments depend not only on certain relationships be-

tween men and women but also on global presumptions about where women will be — and where they should stay. The Innu women were helping us to “unpack” NATO.

One morning the Innu organizers cleared the meeting hall of chairs and asked each of us to imagine ourselves to be a particular woman who was playing a role, maybe even unconsciously, in sustaining, questioning, or resisting this NATO air force base. As each of us thought of a woman, we took on her persona, spoke to the group in the first person as that woman, and joined others sitting on the floor. The floor soon became a complex world of militarized relationships among diverse women. Within an hour that late-winter morning — it was April, but the ice was just receding on the nearby lake — we had populated the wooden floor with women from Canada, the United States, Britain, and Germany, with women married to air force officers, local Innu girls dating young fliers, other Innu women camping on the NATO runways to protest low-flying training flights, Canadian feminists in Toronto unaware of the Canadian government's alliance policies in “remote” Labrador, women from the Philippines eager to share their own experiences of foreign military bases, and more.

More recently, in Tokyo and Okinawa, groups of us tried a similar feminist exercise, inspired by the Innu activists' innovation. Our aim also was to make women visible in international power politics. We sought to piece together a map of where women are in sustaining, questioning, and resisting the unequal U.S.-Japan military alliance. Any assessment of American empire-building today must look closely at the dynamics sustaining this unequal alliance. This time we couldn't move the furniture, so we stood up. Women and men in the audience, one by one, imagined themselves a particular woman living her life inside this

alliance. As we took on the persona of a particular woman, we got onto our feet and spoke out:

I am a young African American woman proud to be serving in the U.S. Marines stationed in Okinawa; thank God, I didn't take that job at Wal-Mart.

I am an Okinawan woman, and I think I'm becoming what you might call an Okinawan nationalist because I'm growing more resentful of officials in the Tokyo government who routinely override our Okinawan concerns when they agree to allow so many U.S. bases to operate here on our land.

I am a young Japanese mainland college graduate. As a woman, I've decided that enlisting in the Japanese Self-Defense Force will offer me more career opportunities than a dead-end job working as a corporate “office lady.”

As some people stood up, others in the audience began to think of more women whose feelings, ideas, and actions were shaping — though scarcely controlling — the current U.S.-Japanese military alliance, a government-to-government agreement that was projecting American military dominance throughout Asia and the Pacific and as far away as Afghanistan. Our “map” was becoming bigger and more complicated with every person who stood up:

I am a Yokohama high school student; my friends and I are dating American sailors to improve our English.

I am a dairy farmer in Kyushu. I care personally about Article Nine, the peace article of the Japanese Constitution, so, in between my daily milkings and stall muckings, I write a small newsletter to tell other Japanese people what it means to live next to a fighter air base. One Friday a month I go and sit outside the gates of the Self-Defense Force fighter plane base;

sometimes a dozen people come to join me; other times I'm sitting there all alone.

Over on the other side of the hall another Japanese young woman then stood up:

I am an American white woman married to a U.S. Navy officer. I'm surprised that the navy's family housing here in Japan is so much nicer than what I have to endure at the base back in the U.S. Maybe I'll urge my husband to reenlist after all.

Then another:

I'm one of those guides you see up in the front of tourist buses all over Okinawa; but recently I've retrained myself to become what's called a "peace guide." Now as my tourist bus travels around the countryside, I point out to visitors all the good farmland and beautiful coastal beaches that have been taken over by American military bases.

Way in the back a young man stood up:

I'm just a housewife. My husband runs a small construction company, which makes me feel so nervous because the Japanese economy has been in recession now for over a decade. I don't like our government offering to send Japanese soldiers to help the Americans occupy Iraq, but I feel relieved that my husband's company just won a government contract to build a new road leading to a U.S. base. How should I reconcile my mixed feelings?

A graduate student at a Tokyo university was sitting toward the front of the room. She waited until the end and then stood up. She turned around to look at others in the large lecture hall:

I'm just starting my doctoral dissertation in political science. There aren't many Japanese women teaching international relations, so to get a university job, I'll need to have the full support of my dissertation supervisor. He's quite well known in the field. Listening to everyone talk here tonight, I now want to change my dissertation research focus so I can look at the lives of Japanese girls and women living near a military base. I want to find out how they relate to the base and what that means for how they imagine themselves in Japanese political life. But my faculty supervisor won't think that asking these questions amounts to doing "real" international politics. How can I persuade him?

These collective acts of Innu, Okinawan, and Tokyo feminist imaginations revealed to all of us several important political realities. Each revelation is relevant to our current thinking about where women are in pursuing — or subverting — any imperial enterprise. *First*, women are intimately engaged in the little-noticed daily workings of those unequal international military alliances that are the backbone of nascent or mature empire-building. *Second*, women's roles in these large structures of international power are far from uniform. In fact, some of these women might view some of the other women who are engaged in the same global structure as too remote or too unsympathetic to become potential partners because of their class, ethnicity, nationality, ideological location, or even just their job. This, despite the fact that some of these women live their daily lives within just a mile of each other.

Third, every one of these women, nonetheless, is where she is on the globalized political map because of dominant notions about femininity and ideas about how she, as a woman or a girl,

should relate to men and to masculinized foreign policies. *Fourth*, many women are privately ambivalent about the complicit roles they play in these unequal international power structures; some of them are actively self-conscious about their ambivalence. *Fifth*, while most of these women never make the headlines, they are counted upon by foreign policy-makers to keep playing their supportive, or at least passive, roles. Today's unequal international alliances depend on that.

AFGHAN WOMEN STAND UP

While spending several months in Tokyo's Ochanomizu University in early 2003, as the Bush administration mobilized to invade Iraq, I had the good fortune to meet and listen to one of the handful of Afghan women who had been appointed to senior posts in the interim government created in the wake of the U.S.-led military invasion of Afghanistan. She herself was not a cabinet minister. Only two of the twenty-seven members chosen for cabinet posts in the interim administration of President Hamid Karzai were women. But she was a deputy minister, with considerable responsibility for shaping the policies and institutions of the post-Taliban state. She was now in her fifties and had been a professional woman before the Taliban's ascendancy. Before that she had fought with the insurgent Afghan *mujahideen* forces against the occupying Soviet army.

As this story will suggest, it seems wise even today not to mention her name or even her precise post. She was in Tokyo at the invitation of the Japanese government, specifically of Japanese women working inside the government's overseas aid program, a

program coordinated with the United Nations relief efforts in postinvasion, post-Taliban Afghanistan.

While passionate about the need to invest in girls' and women's training and empowerment, this Afghan woman official did not see herself as a natural ally of the Afghan women's organization best known outside of the country, the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan, or RAWA.⁴ Afghans (like the Vietnamese, Filipinos, and Tanzanians) have experienced not just one, but several waves of imperialist occupation: Persian, British, Russian, and now American. Creating a sense of national identity in countries such as Afghanistan has meant for many women advocates crafting comparative judgments about both past and present foreign rulers and about rival male-led local parties, each claiming to represent the nation, each claiming to know what is best for the nation's women.

One activist local woman's savvy use of openings created by the latest occupying power looks to another activist local woman like collaboration with the enemy, betrayal of the nation. Neither woman controls the masculinized political contest. Having to make such choices, often in the midst of war, displacement, and confusion, does not breed trust among women.

Thus this woman as a deputy minister, so eager for support in her efforts on behalf of girls' and women's empowerment in the midst of the U.S.-led occupation, voiced distrust of the women active in RAWA. She distrusted their local and international politics, even though RAWA's women activists had taken risks to do this work, as she also had, both inside Afghanistan during the Taliban's rule and in the increasingly politicized male-run refugee camps over the border in Pakistan.⁵ She imagined, nev-

ertheless, that the women active in RAWA had been too sympathetic to Kabul's 1980s Soviet-backed secular regime. So now, during the current U.S.-backed regime, this woman was not only seething with frustration at the patriarchal resistance she encountered daily from the men at the top of the Karzai regime, she was simultaneously keeping an arm's length distance from the activist women of RAWA.

Imperialism does this. It can send out fissures among the advocates of women's rights.

During one of these Tokyo discussions, the Japanese woman who hosted this Afghan deputy minister whispered, "In all the times I have met with her in Kabul, I have never seen her smile." Now, after two weeks in secure Tokyo, enjoying daily conversations with Japanese specialists on women's and girls' health, economy, politics, and education, she seemed to be letting down her guard. She dared to smile. She even made a joke. She had good reason, though, to maintain her deadpan "game face" when she was doing her risky work in Kabul. Not long before, her son had been beaten severely on a street in Kabul by a group of unidentified men. Before he lost consciousness, he heard his assailants warn him, "Tell your mother to get out of the place where she doesn't belong." The message was clear: a year and a half after the U.S. military and their Northern Alliance partners toppled the Taliban regime, any woman who dared to take on a modicum of political authority was still endangering not only herself, but members of her family. This woman was not easily cowed. Following her son's beating, she became angrier and more committed. But smiling was a luxury that an activist woman still could ill afford in Kabul.

Listening between-the-lines to the conversations between this

Afghan deputy minister and the Japanese aid officials hosting her prompted one to ask more questions about the genderings of militarized occupation.

Security — how to measure it, who gets to define it? These issues became contested during the U.S.-led occupation of Afghanistan. It was in the name of what it called the pursuit of "national security" that the Bush administration mounted its invasion of Afghanistan in 2001. In the months following the invasion, now in the name of concentrating its own military forces on combat missions to eliminate the remnants of both Taliban and Al Qaeda armed forces, the U.S. government rejected repeated requests by the UN secretary general, international relief agencies, the Karzai administration, and local Afghan women's groups to extend the reach of the international peacekeeping force — a NATO force, though nominally operating under a UN mandate — beyond the city limits of Kabul. The woman deputy minister told her Japanese hosts that one reason it was proving so difficult to achieve genuine parity between newly recruited male and female teachers was that many men in government claimed that the school districts outside the capital remained too dangerous for women teachers and principals to be appointed.

Danger — when governments claim danger, does the deepening of masculinized authority follow?

Combat — why has a "combat mission" repeatedly trumped peacekeeping and policing in the hierarchical game of competing masculinities? For the first two years of the U.S. military operation in Afghanistan it appeared as though the American military's civilian superiors in Washington wanted to ensure that American soldiers in Afghanistan stayed firmly in control of the hallowed "combat" mission. The supposedly "softer" masculinized mis-

sions of policing and peacekeeping seemingly were best left as the responsibility of German, Canadian, and Dutch men.

This story of the rarely smiling Afghan woman official might be taken by some Americans as a vindication of the Bush administration's militarized, expansionist foreign policy: that is, the violence perpetrated against women by the Taliban regime in the late 1990s was so extreme that only a foreign-led militarized response and foreign occupation were appropriate. In fact, many Americans had only the vaguest notion of where Afghanistan was, or what the longtime U.S. government involvement in its twenty-year civil war had been, or how its Taliban-controlled government was related to the clandestine operations of the insurgent movement led by Osama bin Laden. Consequently, for these American voters, forging a link between the geopolitics of counterterrorism and the liberation of benighted women proved especially helpful in constructing their own informal narratives of the causes for the 2001 U.S. invasion of Afghanistan. The fact that there were *any* women in the postinvasion Karzai interim government and that those women remained under threat only served to entrench many Americans' justifying narrative.

But there is an alternative interpretation. To explore this alternative, we need to ask another Afghan woman to "stand up." This is a young woman living in the Afghanistan province of Herat. Her mother is literate, having attended school in the 1970s, a time when the Afghan regime then in power cited the education of girls as a primary strategy for national modernization. Thus she is eager for her daughter to attend school. But mother and daughter remain subject to public intimidation in Herat if they voice such aspirations. This young woman's life two years after the U.S. invasion is not governed by the American,

UN, and Afghan officials working in Kabul. Her life — her sense of security, physical mobility, personal identity, public identity, educational and economic opportunities — is governed by the self-proclaimed provincial governor of Herat, Ismail Khan.

English-language commentators have called Ismail Khan a "warlord." The label makes Khan sound archaic. It is a label that dampens our political curiosity. In reality, the power Khan and other Afghan regional "warlords" wield in postinvasion Afghanistan derives from two very modern resources: first, Ismail Khan commands a sizable army of his own, equipped with modern weaponry; second, he is deemed an "ally" by the U.S. military.⁶

Herat's Ismail Khan had contributed his troops to a loose amalgam of militarized Afghan opponents, first of the Soviet army in the 1980s and then of the Taliban regime. His forces and those of the other "warlords" are now called the Northern Alliance. The name makes them sound akin to NATO. These Afghan regional commanders were useful to the U.S. government during its own rivalry with the Soviet Union during the Cold War, and they became useful again when the United States decided to wage war against the Taliban and Al Qaeda. In October 2001 the Northern Alliance's commanders and all-male militias — despite their interethnic tensions, they share a history of opposition to the modernizing, secularizing reforms of the 1970s Kabul government — were selected by Washington's war-planners to be their most trusted, effective military allies on the ground when they devised their invasion of Afghanistan in the aftermath of the attacks on New York's World Trade Towers and the Pentagon.

Which men the expansionist foreign elite chooses to become their trusted local allies will almost certainly have repercussions

for local women. Moreover, which men an invading force selects as its local allies will either enhance or, more commonly, undermine the viability of those foreign expansionists' use of "women's emancipation" as a moral justification for their expansionist enterprise. When U.S. policy-makers in Washington selected Ismail Khan and his fellow Northern Alliance antimodernist regional commanders as their most promising allies, they did not employ "the empowerment of Afghan women" as their chief criterion. Instead, the Washington strategists used "ground-level military capability" and "previous experience of cooperation with us" as their principal criteria for choosing their Afghan allies.

The criteria that any expansionist government uses when it chooses its local allies are much better predictors of the expansionists' postinvasion commitment to women's advancement than is any *post hoc* discourse of moral justification.

Furthermore, which men the invading force chooses as its primary local allies will also privilege certain forms of local masculinity. This was true in earlier imperial enterprises, and it is true in any putative imperial enterprises today. Internationally ambitious governments typically have sought local allies as they expanded the reach of their power and authority. Stories of the Spanish expansion into Mexico; the Dutch expansion into what is now Indonesia; the British expansions into Malaya, India, and Egypt; the U.S. expansion into the Philippines; the French expansion into Vietnam — each testifies to this common expansionist strategy of forging unequal local alliances-of-convenience. Empires, that is, are crafted out of unequal alliances between the ambitious imperialists and those local actors who calculate, often mistakenly, that they will be able to extract strategic gains for

themselves even out of a clearly imbalanced alliance. Bedfellows are not all equal. All masculinities are not equal.

Virtually every one of these imperializing alliances was between men. This fact is not trivial.

In postinvasion Afghanistan, the likelihood of the young Herat woman experiencing meaningful liberation, of the sort wishfully imagined by so many Americans who lent their moral support for the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan, has been *made* dependent on a deeply masculinized local provincial regime whose power is ensured by its deeply masculinized foreign institution, the U.S. military.

Several independent human rights researchers investigated what happened to Afghan girls and women between 2001 and 2003. What these researchers discovered, not only in Ismail Khan's Herat, but in many other provinces outside of Kabul where Northern Alliance commanders have used their militias and their intimate ties with American soldiers on the ground to consolidate their grasp on the levers of local power (and money), is that the military strategy that the Bush administration adopted to conduct its invasion has hobbled, not facilitated, the genuine liberation of most of Afghanistan's women and girls. These observers noted the apparently easy rapport that had developed between the male American Special Forces soldiers — the Special Forces being perhaps the most masculinized of all U.S. military units — and the local governor's militiamen, perhaps due to their shared identity as "combat-tested men." The investigators also noted that, despite their opposition to the Taliban regime, Ismail Khan and the Northern Alliance commanders were committed to a very patriarchal form of post-Taliban social order. Ismail

Khan thus shared with the Taliban's and Al Qaeda's male leaders a belief that controlling women's marital and sexual relations was important for sustaining a hold on power.⁷

The Northern Alliance and its relationships with the U.S. military warrant feminist-informed investigations for several reasons. We need to know in precisely which ways shared masculinity has facilitated the sustaining of this alliance between Herat's "warlord" Ismail Khan and the U.S. field commanders. We also need to know in exactly which ways, other differences notwithstanding, shared masculinities created easy rapport between the American and Afghan Northern Alliance commanders' rank-and-file men, assisting both in consolidating their authority in their respective daily operations. In addition, we need to explore the ways in which this two-layered masculinization served to entrench the Northern Alliance regional commanders' own notions of subordinate femininity.

Further, in our investigation of contemporary American expansionism, we need to pay serious attention to the rivalry between the Northern Alliance commanders' model of masculinity and the models of masculinity being projected by the Kabul-based senior civilian officials in Hamid Karzai's cabinet. Some Afghans declared this to be a contest between the "warlords" and the "neckties." Men such as Ismail Khan could claim that the "neckties" sitting in Kabul had become the "lackeys" of the U.S. and other foreign donors (the UN, the European Union, and Japan). Khan and the other warlords — despite their intense ethnicized distrust of each other — on the other hand, could claim to be combat-tested veterans, commanders of men, men who had wielded manly violence and risked their lives to defend the nation. The warlords thus could drape over their patriarchal shoulders the mantle of mas-

culinized nationalism. Their ability to control the women in their provinces and to act as the guardians of "true" Afghan femininity had become a crucial component of their ability to mobilize their own male armies and to collect their own tax revenues.

On the other hand, the "neckties" — represented especially in President Karzai's minister of finance — could claim to be Men of Reason. "Reason" and "combat" — both have been used repeatedly by men of myriad cultures to compete with other men for the political brass ring: being recognized as the most manly of public men. The Afghan men in neckties could thus see themselves as builders of a new centralized constitutional state, a political order based on laws and budgets, not on artillery and armed road blocks. The necktie wearers could portray themselves as being able to represent the nation's interests where it counted, not on some desolate battlefield, but in the corridors of the most important masculinized international arenas, the United Nations Security Council, the U.S. State Department, the World Bank, the European Commission.⁸

One might think that any form of dominant masculinity might be better for most women than the warlord variety is. In practice, however, Afghan women hoping for the access to education, public voice, and economic opportunities that U.S. officials promised for women commonly have found that there is little space left for autonomous women in such a warlords vs. neckties masculinized contest. In such a contest, women are deemed crucial by the rivals, but merely as symbols, subordinates, admirers, or spectators. Men rivaling each other in the arena of politicized masculinity always have needed to ensure that "their" women will play those politically salient feminized roles. That is not liberation. That is not authentic citizenship.

Wait. Now another Afghan woman is standing up. She is Suraya Parlika. Trained as a lawyer, she has led the Afghan women's lawyers association based in Kabul, one of several non-governmental organizations founded by women in the wake of the fall of the Taliban regime. In late 2003 Suraya Parlika decided to monitor the commission assigned to draft Afghanistan's new constitution.⁹ She and her colleagues were thus prepared not only to read the fine print of the newly drafted Afghan constitution, but also to write constitutional proposals of their own. Coming to the meeting, Suraya Parlika and her colleagues each chose to defy intimidating personal threats against Afghans daring to introduce the discourse of human rights into local politics.¹⁰

Suraya Parlika and her co-organizers took the unusual step of inviting — and persuading the Karzai government to temporarily release just for this purpose — three women prisoners: Eqlima, who had been jailed on charges of running away from an abusive uncle's home; Mina, who had been arrested for running away from a "husband" to whom she had been sold; Rosia, who had been imprisoned for fleeing her father-in-law's house after being forced to marry her brother-in-law after her own husband's death. Parlika and the other activist women invited these three imprisoned women to their conference because they believed that a country's constitution could not be fairly and realistically drafted *unless* its provisions flowed from an understanding of the experiences of debilitating gender power imbalance that actually shaped the daily lives of women and girls.

With her co-organizers, Suraya Parlika was going far beyond Abigail Adams's much-quoted eighteenth-century modest admonition to John, her constitution-drafting husband: "Remember the ladies." These Afghan women activists were drawing lessons

from their own twentieth-century Afghan experiences of living with constitutions written, constitutions amended, constitutions partially implemented, constitutions left unimplemented. Like women activists recently in South Africa, Cambodia, Palestine, Rwanda, and East Timor, and like feminists active in UN peace-keeping operations around the world, these Afghan women meeting in postinvasion Kandahar had become convinced that the writing of a new constitution must become women's business. Any constitution, after all, is a blueprint for a state's power and authority, a design for distributing powers and responsibilities within the state's institutions, and a map of citizens' limitations, rights, and responsibilities.

Since every stroke of the constitutional pen can either empower women as full citizens or turn them into marginalized dependents of male citizens and a patriarchal state, drafting and ratifying a constitution must be processes that include politically conscious women, preferably in equal numbers with men around the drafting table and in the ratifying assembly. If that fair representation proved impossible to achieve, then, these women had concluded, women had to be on the alert, mobilized right outside the drafting room door. In fact, the 2003 Afghanistan constitution-drafting commission did include seven women among its thirty-five appointed members — a significant presence, though men remained a decisive majority. Thus Suraya Parlika and her colleagues used their four days to listen to the stories of Eqlima, Rosia, and Mina and then to draw up their own constitutional proposals.

Here are the provisions Parlika and her colleagues concluded had to be explicitly included in the new Afghanistan constitution if it were to ensure Afghan women's participation in public life as

fully autonomous and effective citizens: (1) mandatory education for girls through secondary school, (2) guaranteed freedom of speech for women, (3) insurance that every woman would be free to cast her own ballot and to run for elected office, (4) insurance that women would have equal representation with men in the government's new legislature, (5) the appointment of an equal number of women and men to judgeships, (6) entitlement of women to pay rates equal to those of men, and (7) a guarantee that women would have the right to exert control over their own finances and to inherit property.¹¹

All of these provisions, individually and taken together, would not only upset political convention, but fundamentally rearrange the relationships between women and men in the sphere commonly imagined to be "private." Yet the women conferees weren't finished. After listening carefully to the stories of Rosia, Eqlima, and Mina, Parlaka and the other activists pressed for additional provisions in the new Afghanistan constitution: (8) permission for women to bring criminal charges against men for domestic violence and sexual harassment, whether those violations occurred in a public place or inside a home, (9) a ban on the common practice of family members handing over girls and women to another family as compensation for crimes committed by the former against the latter, (10) raising the legal age of marriage from sixteen years to eighteen years, (11) the right of women to marry and divorce "in accordance with Islam," and (12) a reduction of the time that women would have to wait to remarry if their husbands abandoned them or disappeared.¹²

These twelve provisions did not add up to the vision of a post-Taliban "good society" for which most Northern Alliance male commanders had been waging their wars. Those Northern

Alliance commanders, several of whom had served as governors and cabinet ministers in the interim government, were among the influential men who tried to wield influence over the large national council, the *loya jirga*, that convened in Kabul in December 2003. This was the national assembly designated to consider—and amend—the draft constitution. The success of Parlaka Suraya and her allies in pressing for a new constitutional state that was structurally and ideologically designed to fulfill the promise of women's liberation depended in large part on whether the U.S. government still imagined the Northern Alliance commanders to be its chief partners in expanding the American security net's global reach. It remained unclear who American officials would choose as their best allies to achieve American and global "security": the warlords, the neckties, or the women activists.

In January 2004 the *loya jirga's* delegates, after heated debate, passed a draft constitution. At the heart is ambiguity. On the one hand is the guarantee of women's and men's equality. On the other hand is the pledge that Afghanistan's future law-making will be "informed by" the principles of Islam, which when interpreted by conservatives, treat such gendered equality as anathema. Who will support Afghan women activists when they press the new government to enforce the constitution's first guarantee?¹³

WHERE ARE THE WOMEN IN THE U.S.-DOMINATED OCCUPATION OF IRAQ?

Three women who might help us better understand the U.S.-British military invasion of Iraq and its drawn-out militarized occupation are Raja Habib Khuzai, one of three Iraqi women members of the U.S.-annointed Governing Council; Nimo Din Kha

Skander, a woman who operates a small hair salon in Baghdad; and Kawkab Jalil, one of the women activists who have begun organizing independently to advocate for women's participation in the U.S. occupation era's emerging political system.

These three women do not represent all of the women in Iraq, nor would they make such a claim. But if we start to take seriously at least these three distinct, complex, thinking women, we are likely to make visible where women are and where femininities are in the consolidation or, alternatively, the subversion of the U.S. expansionist enterprise. That, in turn, should shine a bright light on where the men are and where rival masculinities are in Iraqis' U.S.-dominated postinvasion lives.

Raja Habib Khuzai takes the floor. She is a medical doctor and maternity hospital director, a skilled professional. Until September 2003 Khuzai was one of three women on the twenty-five-member Iraqi Governing Council. After September she was one of only two. On September 20, 2003, her colleague, Akila al-Hashimi, was gunned down by unknown assailants in broad daylight as she was leaving her Baghdad home.¹⁴ Akila al-Hashimi, then fifty, had been a career Iraqi diplomat. She was described by journalists as a "member of a prominent family of Shiite clerics" and a "force for peace and tolerance."¹⁵

Both Akila al-Hashimi and Raja Habib Khuzai had been selected to serve on the U.S.-approved Governing Council in early July 2003 as a result of what was reportedly intense behind-the-scenes bargaining, bargaining not unlike the sort that had produced the interim cabinet of Afghanistan president Hamid Karzai a year earlier. The need to use the maddeningly passive tense — "had been selected" — in the previous sentence is telling. To date, we do not know precisely what dynamics shaped this

Baghdad bargaining and its eventual outcome. But in virtually every political system we know about, the less transparent any process of political bargaining is, the more likely it is to be governed by presumptions of masculinized politics.

The cause for this masculinization is this: closed-door bargaining is less vulnerable to popular pressure and popular scrutiny. Those who wield the most influence in such backroom political transactions are those who come into the process with resources that can be converted into political currency. First are those who have organized public support — based on religion, ethnicity, or political party affiliation. In Afghanistan rivalries between self-declared male leaders of the Pashtun majority and the Uzbek and Tajik minorities became central in the bargaining. Similarly, in Iraq the ethnicized and sectarian male-led organizations of Shiite and Sunni Muslims, Kurdish ethnic communities, and Kurdish rival political parties were seen as the salient divisions that required juggling on the Governing Council. That is, organized ethnic, religious, and ideological divisions were thought by the crafters of the new Afghan and Iraqi governments to be the salient bases for representation. Gender was deemed by these same men to be simply symbolic, a step above trivial. Second among the individuals enjoying an advantage in closed-door bargaining sessions are those who have ready access to weapons and to armed men. Third are those with economic resources — companies of their own, trading connections, open lines to donors, bank accounts abroad. And fourth among the advantaged bargainers are those people who have earned credibility in the eyes of those foreign men orchestrating the bargaining. In the case of the formation of the postinvasion Iraqi Governing Council, that meant credibility in the eyes of the American oc-



Pictured here are those Iraqi opponents of Saddam Hussein's regime whom U.S. officials chose to invite to London in December 2002 to design a "post-Saddam" regime. Both American officials and political commentators noted the religious, ethnic, and party diversity of the invitees, but they failed to find the group's masculinized uniformity significant. (AP Photo/Alastair Grant, courtesy AP/Wide World Photos)

cupation officials and their superiors in Washington. Some players in any backroom bargaining possess all four convertible resources. In most political systems all of these bargaining chips are kept out of the hands of all but a very few women.

The bargaining process that produced the 2003 Iraqi Governing Council had been going on among a virtually all-male cast of characters in various forums since December 2002, months before the Bush administration and its British allies launched their military invasion. At the December 2002 London meeting convened by the Bush administration, sixty Iraqis were invited. They were deemed by Washington strategists to be key players in the opposition to the Saddam Hussein regime. Of the sixty, three were women. In May 2003, with the Americans now in military

control of Baghdad (though scarcely having a firm grasp on the country's postwar politics), the Bush administration called a second meeting to map out a post-Saddam political system. This time American officials invited three hundred Iraqis. Now the number of women included rose to five.¹⁶

What was notable about the three women eventually selected for membership in the Iraqi Governing Council was that they did not have access to the four bargaining chips crucial to effective political influence. That is, Raja Habib Khuzai and the other two women each entered the Governing Council without their own political parties, without their own militias, without their own treasuries, and without their own direct lines of communication to Washington.

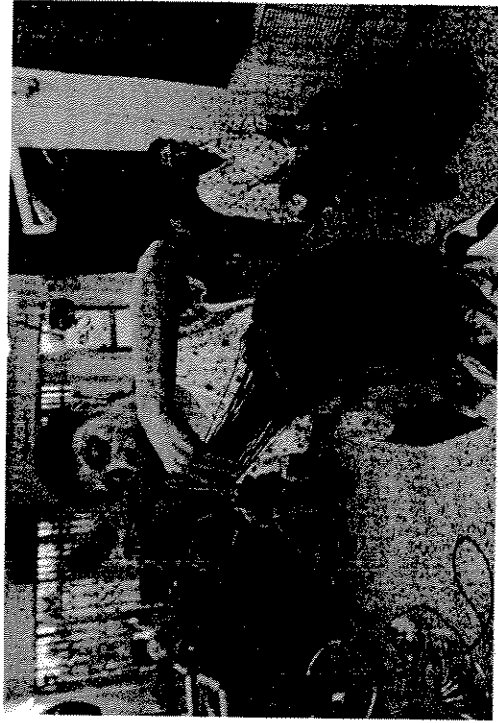
Looking down the list of the twenty-five members of the Governing Council, what stood out was how their twenty-two male colleagues were identified. These men were identified not as individuals with their own professional credentials, but instead as leaders of this or that political party or public organization. Perhaps the three women were selected by the bargainers precisely because they could make the Council look minimally legitimate to the world, while not possessing the political resources needed to shape the Council's agenda. Maybe the three women would not even make common cause with each other. Masculinizing the internal culture of the new Governing Council thus could proceed undisturbed. Maybe.

It likely became difficult for any of the three women (or later two) on the Council to wield effective influence with either their fellow Council members or with the U.S. occupation authorities. Thus when the question arose about what steps should be taken to draft a new constitution for Iraq and reporters tried to figure

out who among the Governing Council's members seemed to be wielding the most influence in that debate, the names of the "power brokers" mentioned were all male.¹⁷

Now an Iraqi beautician stands up. Dressed in snug-fitting pants and a flower-patterned top, she is Nimo Din'Kha Skander.¹⁸ She describes her small business, the Nimo Beauty Salon, as a lively place. Just a single room in the busy Karrada neighborhood of Baghdad, the salon attracts women of several generations for haircuts, facials, and hair dyeing. Some of her customers wear head scarves, but many do not. The Nimo Beauty Salon is also a place where political affairs are regularly analyzed. Nimo Din'Kha Skander could be seen as presiding over a political forum.

While choosing hair colors, she and her customers talk about where the country is heading, whether male clerics could ever win a majority of Iraqis' votes, what the American occupiers ultimately intend. Like other Iraqi women and girls, they have heard harrowing stories of abductions and rapes of women since the lawlessness escalated after the collapse of Saddam Hussein's regime. They talk about the rapes in whispers. Stories of sexual assaults make many of them afraid to travel about the city. They know of some women and girls who have become afraid to leave their homes at all. There is no sign that the new U.S.-recruited-and-trained police force is being taught to take violence against women seriously. The police recruits selected by the U.S. occupation officials, furthermore, appear to be only men. The militias still controlled by some clerics and certain political parties also seem to be exclusively male.¹⁹ This combination of masculinized security forces and a lack of gender-security-planning consciousness deprives Iraqi women of opportunities to be effective partic-



Iraqi women customers in a beauty parlor in October 2003. Women may talk with each other about the politics of security far from the fortified compounds of the Governing Council and the U.S. occupation authorities. (Photo: Laura Boushnak/AFP/Getty Images)

ipants in the emerging new political system. It is no wonder that only men appear at street demonstrations.²⁰

Despite the political character of their conversations at the Nimo Beauty Salon, these women see "politics" as happening somewhere else, somewhere they are not. In this perception, Nimo Din'Kha Skander and her customers share a view commonly held by more influential political commentators. Everyone imagines a beauty parlor to be a feminized space, a private place. Politics couldn't, therefore, be going on here. It takes a feminist curiosity to see a beauty salon as a political forum — and to pay attention. Here is where the relationship between public

and private power is being sorted out. Here the nature of the past's influence on the present is being weighed. Here the implications of sexual violence for enacting effective citizenship are being exposed. A feminized space is not the opposite of a political place. For many women, especially in a time of foreign military occupation, governmental flux, masculinized rivalries, and increasing sexualized violence, a feminized space may be the most secure political place for them to trade analyses and strategies.

Baghdad in the 1990s was not Kabul in the 1990s. The Nimo Beauty Salon was never shut down by the regime of Saddam Hussein. In fact, Nimo Din'Kha Skander takes pride in having had Saddam Hussein's second wife as a customer. Yet, over the past decade, there have been changes in the constrictions faced by women, which many women have internalized.

The regime headed by Saddam Hussein was built on the strength of the Baathist party, a political party despised by both the young Afghan men who joined the Taliban and the Arab men who became followers of Osama bin Laden. The Baathist party was a secular, nationalist political party. Iraqi women first voted in 1980. Women's education, women's paid work, women's votes, all were encouraged by the Baathist-run government, not for the sake of democratization but for the sake of economic growth, to earn Iraq the status of being a "modern" nation and to maximize the regime's wartime mobilization. By 2000, 78 percent of school-age Iraqi girls were enrolled in primary schools.²¹ However, after its 1991 defeat in the first Gulf War and during the subsequent decade of international economic sanctions, Saddam Hussein's regime sought to garner more regional aid by diluting its secular ideology and vaguely courting Islamic support. During the 1980s

war with Iran, the Iraqi regime sought to attract more women into paid civil service jobs in order to replace the thousands of men it was drafting into its army. By contrast, during the 1990s, the regime, worried about dents in Iraqi men's sense of manly esteem after two devastating wartime defeats, promoted a more conservative brand of femininity. At the same time, many younger Iraqi women — now enduring postwar hardships and cut off from the outside world, not free to travel as their mothers and aunts had before them — began to adopt a more literal interpretation of Islamic femininity. To the dismay of many older urban Iraqi women, who had fought in earlier decades for women's right to live their lives as autonomous individuals, it became more common for young Iraqi women to adopt head scarves.²²

Women's liberation in any country rarely follows a simple path "onward and upward." Women's status and political participation can vary surprisingly from one decade to another, from one generation to another. One's feminist curiosity, consequently, needs to have staying power. One cannot afford the luxury of turning away to follow the "next new thing" as soon as women in a country have won the vote, or as soon as a handful of women have been awarded cabinet portfolios, or even when many women have gained access to reproductive rights.

Progress in rolling back patriarchy can prove stunningly ephemeral. Older women are sometimes more literate, more worldly, more economically autonomous than their daughters and nieces. With some wars and postwar times women's sphere of economic, social, and even political influence widens. With other wars and postwar times those spheres dramatically shrink. The key causal factor here is whether the war-waging and postwar government is masculinist. If the government continues to priv-

illegitimate masculinity, then even those policies it may enact to widen women's spheres of activity can be reversed as soon as it decides such a reversal is politically convenient. This is a lesson that both Afghan and Iraqi women have learned. The broadening of women's autonomy is secure only when that broadening actually rolls back the masculinization of both local and foreign interventionist political cultures and government power.

Kawkab Jalil now rises to her feet. She is dressed in a fashionably tailored long black dress.²³ Her fingernails are hennaed. Her dark hair is uncovered. Kawkab Jalil, who is forty-six, explains that she only donned the scarf a year earlier due to social pressure, but recently put it aside when she decided that she did not have to prove her feminine respectability to strangers. She did not remove her head scarf to make Americans feel satisfied in their roles as "liberators." Jalil had stayed in Iraq during the eight-year war with Iran, the years of international sanctions, the era of increasing intimidation by the Baathist regime. She stayed even after being forced out of her long-standing job at the state electrical company when she refused to join the ruling party. In the wake of the fall of the Baathist regime and the confusion set off by the U.S. military conquest, Jalil says, "We need more courage, further boldness. We must reflect a bright future of Iraqi women. Not be oppressed, weak people who have no power."²⁴

Kawkab Jalil was not a participant in the backroom bargaining sessions that produced the U.S.-appointed Governing Council. She instead joined a small number of Iraqi women in activating independent women's advocacy organizations designed to put pressure on both the Governing Council and the U.S. occupation authorities. Jalil herself has become a member of the Iraqi Women's League leadership committee. The League was founded

in the 1950s but was forced underground during the Saddam Hussein era. By August 2003, five months after the American and British invasion, the League membership had risen to five hundred women, though Jalil and other women of the older generation noticed that many of the younger women who were now becoming active remained tentative. It was not a matter of their age, but rather of their historical generation. These younger Iraqi women had grown up with little chance to speak out or to learn organizational skills.²⁵

Among the conditions that Jalil and other Iraqi activist women have tried to transform into political issues is the escalating violence against women. In August 2003 another women's group, the Organization of Women's Freedom in Iraq (OWFI), led a public demonstration in Baghdad to call for official action to stop the abduction of and assaults on women. Sixty people came out to demonstrate. One middle-aged woman who attended said, "This is my first demonstration for thirty-five years. . . . I came out here all by myself today to raise my voice, but where are all the women?"²⁶ A majority of the demonstrators, even on this issue so crucial to women, were men. The attendance gender profile says less about women's political consciousness than it does about how far—in any society—the threat of violence suppresses women's capacity to behave as fully participant political actors.

Insofar as the American occupation officials and their hand-picked Iraqi male advisors treated violence against women as a secondary matter, as something that could be dealt with later, the emerging Iraqi political system would become masculinized. Violence against women, as so many feminists—from the Congo to Kosovo to East Timor—have taught us, must be accorded ur-

gent political attention if women are to gain the status of genuinely autonomous citizens.²⁷

About the three women chosen behind closed doors to serve on the twenty-five-member Iraqi Governing Council, activist women such as Kawkab Jalil have expressed skepticism. At one strategy meeting, women kept telling an American reporter, "We do not know them . . . who are they?"²⁸ They noted that not one of the then-three women on the Council seemed to have an influential organizational support base of her own and thus would be unlikely to carry much political weight in either the Council's own deliberations or lobbying the American authorities. Warned a schoolteacher, "And if they're going to fail, that's it. They won't give this chance to women again."²⁹

Then there is the serious matter of drafting Iraq's new constitution. Iraqi women activists, just like Afghanistan's women's rights advocates, decided that those chosen to draft, amend, and ratify the new constitution would shape women's lives for years to come. Thus women activists were dismayed at the composition of the committee chosen to draft the new constitution: of twenty-five members, all were men.³⁰ It appeared that the U.S. occupation authorities, their superiors in Washington, and the members of the Iraqi Governing Council all deemed women's future relationships to the state, to the law, and to male citizens well cared for in the hands of a small group of ethnically, religiously, and ideologically competitive men. But, these Iraqi activist women argued, this was a highly questionable supposition.

To bolster their political position, some Iraqi activist women therefore began to foster alliances with women activists outside Iraq. A group of exiled Iraqi women in Britain created the Iraqi Women's Rights Coalition (IWRC), which began to publish its

own newsletter, *Equality Rights Now!* These British-based Iraqi women lent support to the women who, in June 2003, founded the Organization of Women's Freedom in Iraq.³¹ One of the group's first efforts was to establish a shelter in Baghdad for Iraqi women suffering from domestic violence, including threats of "honor killings" by their own brothers, fathers, and uncles.³² In August 2003 OWFI members wrote a formal letter to Paul Bremer, the chief U.S. occupation administrator in Baghdad, calling on him to use his authority to address the "unprecedented violence against women." He did not reply.³³

In October 2000 the U.S. government voted, along with a majority of the UN Security Council, in favor of Security Council Resolution 1325. This groundbreaking resolution committed all agencies of the UN and every UN member state to ensuring that both women and women's concerns become integral to every new security institution and every decision-making stage in peacekeeping and national reconstruction in any area of armed conflict. Despite its vote for the historic SCR 1325, the U.S. government felt free to appoint an all-male constitution-drafting committee in occupied Iraq and to create newly remasculinized Iraqi police and security forces.³⁴

CONCLUSION

In October 2003, one of the founders of OWFI, Yanar Mohammed, sought to raise the consciousness of Americans by traveling to New York. Yanar Mohammed, once active in Iraq's Communist party, a group banned by the Baathist regime, had spent her exile years in Canada. She returned to Iraq in the wake of the invasion to contribute to the new mobilization of women. Spon-

soring her visit was a group of New York women who had created the Working Committee in Support of Iraq's Women.³⁵

Women in colonized countries, women in militarily occupied countries, and women under local authoritarian rulers all have a long history of seeking alliances with those women abroad who seem sympathetic to their causes. The internationalization of women-to-women political alliances is not new. It began in the mid-1800s. There is plenty of evidence, garnered by feminist historians, to suggest that sustaining such alliances is hard political work.³⁶ There are the pulls and pushes of local women's own nonfeminist male potential allies. Men who oppose foreign occupation or foreign domination are not necessarily men who see the "sovereign nation" as composed of women and men living as equals in the family, the market, the courts, the universities, and the state's policy-making circles. Yet it is precisely those nonfeminist, even outrightly patriarchal, men with whom some women may believe they must make common cause, at least tactically. This can prove hard to explain to overseas feminist partners. Then there are the pitfalls of miscommunication. Mail now travels in a cybernetic flash, rather than via weeks of ocean voyage, but speed does not assure shared understanding of the terms and phrases. In fact, today any miscommunication can be spread far and wide with alarming quickness and so prove harder to undo. And there is burnout. Doing alliance-building among women, none of whom control abundant resources of time or money, can tax the most dedicated of internationally minded feminists.

In addition, as we have painfully learned, there is the perpetual temptation for women residing outside the war-torn or imperially occupied country to imagine that, by dint of their access to media and financial resources, those women residing in the

affluent country also may have a superior understanding of what should be prioritized in the local women's struggle. And there is local women activists' complementary temptation to tailor their strategies and their discourses to reassure the seemingly well-endowed overseas supporters.

On the other hand, the step-by-step building of such dynamic cross-national alliances among women holds out the possibility that women in the imperially minded country will themselves gain a new understanding of their own government's policies and actions overseas, and this will prompt them to publicly question their government's official justifications for expansionist maneuvers carried out in their names. Moreover, if women pursue a genuine cross-national alliance of equals, it will involve a lot of intense listening, questioning, and rethinking. Such efforts, in turn, can sharpen activists' feminist understandings of what causes the perpetuation of masculinization in public life, not only "over there" but "here at home."

The intensity and variety of cross-national feminist interactions today are beyond anything seen before in the history of empires or international politics. These feminist interactions are producing fresh analyses of what is causing and perpetuating unequal international power and offering strategies to expose those causes and subvert them. Thus it would be a mistake, I think, to imagine that the latest version of empire-building in the name of "world order" or "global security" or "civilization" is an unstoppable steamroller.

Crafting a system of expansive, cohesive political influence — an empire — has always been a tricky enterprise. Only in retrospect do the earlier British, Ottoman, or Spanish empires look deceptively unavoidable. In practice, there were doubters and

critics whom imperialists had to try to persuade or silence at home; there were rebels and recalcitrants they needed to co-opt or suppress in the occupied society. Silencing, suppressing, persuading, co-opting — these imperial activities have not guaranteed success over the long term. In large part, each is dependent on certain gender ideologies. And these ideologies, we have seen, are vulnerable to contradiction and challenge.

Masculinity has always been an essential tool wielded in this many-pronged process of empire-building. At home it has been necessary to convince both men and women that a militarized manliness (especially one allied with a manly sort of reason and a manly brand of commercial competitiveness) was a superior form of humanity. Both men and women have had to be persuaded that this construction of privileged masculinity endowed those actors who claimed to possess it with unique capacities to bring security and a sense of moral well-being to citizens at home, while it simultaneously conferred enlightenment, progress, and “civilization” on those abroad over whom they held sway. Security, moral satisfaction, progress, civilization — all are gendered. Subtract the politics of masculinity and the politics of femininity from one’s investigation, and one is likely to produce an unreliable explanation of how empire-building proceeds — or falters.

For such militarized expansionism does falter, does lose its protective glow at home and among the co-opted and daunted abroad. It falters if the “civilizing” rewards promised turn out to fuel not the blessings of technocracy, order, and peace, but instead violence, corruption, and demoralization. Ambitious expansionism also stumbles if the performers of privileged masculinity appear self-serving or naive — or both.

The privileging of masculinity in general and certain forms of masculinity in particular thus need to be investigated. Making sense of the masculinized political cultures and masculinized political processes that legitimize and energize global expansionism, however, cannot be accomplished just by paying attention to varieties of men. Paying serious attention to women — to their experiences, their actions, and their ideas, in all their diversity; that is, wielding a feminist curiosity — is the only way to ensure that men-as-men and masculinity as an ideology can be seen with political clarity.

But what if we don’t? No sustained curiosity about women means no discussion of the politics of femininity. No serious analysis of the politics of women and femininity converts into no concentrated public thinking about men and masculinities. No focused investigation of men and masculinities means no understanding of the genderings of international affairs. No curiosity about how and why international affairs have become reliant on particular ideas about femininity and masculinity produces little chance to make the global workings of unequal power fully visible. No visible rendering of internationalized gender means no possibility of instituting genuine and lasting change in those unequal power arrangements at home and abroad.